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1963/08/21

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TELCON

President

Ball

August 21, 1963

8:40am

BALL - Mr. President I wanted to give you a rundown on the situation in Viet Nam cause a lots happened there during the night

JFK - Right

BALL - There doesn't seem to be any real fighting there they've put a very tight clamp on everything sealed the airports as well as the PTT-----they have cleaned out the Pagodas and theres been some shooting and they've hauled a lot of Buddhists off to jail-----two of the Bonzas escaped and came in to our USON building -- I countermanded the orders last and told them to keep the Bonzas there and not release them pending a further look at the situation -- we don't normally give sanctuary but I think if we turned those two Bonzas over and they got shot we'd be in a terrible trouble

JFK - That's right -- thats fine

BALL - Halpresten and the UPI fellow had a talk with our CAS our CIA fellow out there yesterday and said that they had proof that the Embassy was behind this repressive move of the government and that they were going to file stories to that effect -- they haven't been able to get their stories out because all the facilities have been clogged and I thought that it was essential that we get a statement out ahead of any story which would kill a story of that kind and I got a statement up last night which we cabled out to Saigon to get their reaction to it which would be about like this, "On the basis of information from Saigon it appears that the government of the Republic of Viet Nam has instituted serious repressive measures against Vietnamese Buddhists. The action represents a direct violation of the Vietnamese Government of assurances by the Vietnamese Government of a assurances that it was beside the policy of reconciliation with the Buddhists. The United States deplores repressive actions of this nature. We shall continue to assist Viet Nam to resist communist aggression and maintain its independence."

JFK - I don't know about that last sentence.-----I think we could -----have you put the statement out yet?-----

BALL - NO No

JFK - Oh well why don't you leave that last sentence out?

BALL - Well ---

JFK - At this point -- I mean

BALL - I didn't --- this sentence was just something we put in as an after thought this morning --- and

JFK -- But I mean that's sort of almost ----nonsignator

BALL -- Yea it is

JFK - Why don't you -- I mean, we can stick with the first part ---- I would think right now

BALL - Alright --- now on this first part

JFK - Halpresten whatever that ---- name is, what is he using for evidence?

BALL - We have no idea - now the situation on the story is this, that because that the telegraphic facilities are locked up out there the army's in the telegraph office they haven't been able to file anything so they have been giving it to the Embassy and we've got two radio stories in this morning which we haven't yet released and an operational notice saying ten more stories are coming in. Now I don't think that we can release any bi-line stories as such and what I would propose to do if its alright with you, is to get out a kind of summary statement of all the facts that we have saying that these come from sources which -- from various sources all of which cannot be checked out through government channels -- and, but release them generally to the press

JFK - Yea - Ok that's fine

BALL - But not give anybody credit for any bi-line

JFK - OK, because --- let's try it and then I think that we probably oughta so that they won't say that the Embassy killed his story, we probably oughta tell them out there that we can't take any bi-line stories.

BALL - Well that's right

JFK - eliminate that business ----but we oughta tell them that before they file some unpleasand ----- you know that'll convince them more than ever

BALL - No, I agree, we haven't---- all that Trueheart told them was that he would file and he didn't know what Washington would do with it, so that we'll just get back to him and tell him -----

JFK - Actually isn't that sort of a breach of diplomatic --

BALL - It is and that's why I didn't let them release the thing to the papers - but you see we can get out a general release saying that this is not information coming in through governmental channels which has not been fully checked, and that's just information to the press -- no particular papers getting any special statements

JFK - Where's our friend Cabot?

BALL - He's still in Honolulu and he's not due for another six days

JFK - We should get him out there, don't you think?

BALL - I would be inclined to wait a day simply because if he arrives with the government in this kind of shape he won't be able to get his accreditation and there's nothing more helpless than an Ambassador that can't talk to the government, and maybe ----

JFK - If----I'm more concerned about Halpresten and these others if they are gonna charge the United States government was in on this --- we've gotta get

BALL - We got in touch with Scotty last night and I think we can ---I didn't want to tell him what the story was, but I think we can handle it with Scotty

JFK - Why don't you get Scotty and tell him that this is what this fella said --- that we don't have any evidence --- we don't know anything about ---

BALL - That the government position is represented by this statement that we're getting out

JFK - Just say that its untrue - which it is. I think if you told that to Scotty --- wh was the -----fella that says that ----

BALL - Its the UPI fellow - I don't know his name ----But those stories are not in yet and they haven't got any way of getting them in you see-----I don't want to be in a position where we ----We'll have to tell the Times about this and I'll talk to Scotty right away.

JFK - The Times will want to have them released --- I think that if we can just establish a policy related to the Halpresten story and tell out at the Embassy that we can't release any bi-line stories then they won't say we tried to

BALL - I'm quite clear that we'd compromise our whole

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JFK - I think that this is going to be a big thing. Cabot can't be setting on his but in Honolulu, he may be helpless but he oughta be out there. I think it's going to make us look bad if he's not

BALL - alright we'll get him out there right away.

JFK - Let him be the recipient of any of these complaints because they can't blame him and he'll be in a better position to talk to the American press than anyone in addition to protect any citizen
-----think we oughta have him there

BALL -- alright we'll move him out right away

JFK - OK